

## **~ What is so special about Union Chapel? Could we each go somewhere else? ~**

Union Chapel as a church is shrinking at the moment. Not the building; that's standing tall. Not the Union Chapel Community as a whole - that's vibrant, lots going on all week, every week. But the departure of a number of (much loved, much missed) people from the church congregation has made a difference on Sunday mornings. And that raises questions for those of us who are still here. Are we a die-hard group of people who refuse to submit to the inevitable? A faithful remnant? Are we a stubborn houseplant that just keeps going, apparently without resources or prospect? Or is there a seed of something here that could take root and start to grow, again?

Four ideas about why we are in the situation we are in. Perhaps they all apply, to some extent:

1. There is nowhere else for us to go, so we just keep going. I don't want to be facetious, but this is an old trope: 'Lord, to whom shall we go?' We have come too far to turn back; invested too much; built too many memories, too many associations. Nowhere else could conceivably match the culture we have built around the place. Not Iona; not Taize; no other Baptist church; no other church. And so we just keep going.
2. We have become trapped. The particular network of loyalty, obligation, duty, familiarity and the familial is one that we value, but it also holds us down; it leads to in-jokes that inadvertently keep outsiders out; the laughter of recognition, which is particularly excluding to anyone feeling nervous about a new group of people. It is a very particular person who makes their way in.
3. There is something special about us. Well of course there is, but probably no more so than in any other group of people who know and love each other. There is a quality about Union Chapel as a church that we each recognise, albeit differently according to our particular dispositions and experience. For some it becomes evident on Easter mornings, or in Christmas services, at Food

Bank sorting sessions, sometimes at the church weekend; in planning meetings, sometimes, and on walks, and on Sunday mornings, sometimes; a willingness to see past each other's idiosyncrasies, to hear each other's stories, to be there for each other, to play our part in each other's lives. We don't want to lose that. To some extent, we are who we are precisely in the activity we take part in together. We extend each other. But we also restrict each other.

4. We are just like many other churches. Perhaps the most challenging idea for us is that we aren't special at all; that what is happening to us is happening across the land. A generation of church-going people is being replaced by one that has no such habit, and is forming no such habit, and has no use for such a habit. They look at us as a relic of a time that is past; they associate with us as one might with a friendly but slightly eccentric elderly relative, who one has no real need to understand.

One question: who are 'we', and what is 'ours'? Reading through these four points, this is perhaps the biggest and most problematic implication: that we know, and are comfortable with maintaining the boundaries of, a particular 'us'.

Three ways to change our situation (admittedly, with little regard for the legal restrictions on the church as part of the Baptist Union). Perhaps all are possible, to some extent:

1. We find a way to tell people (including 'ourselves') the good news of Union Chapel, as it is now. We find a way to open up. We change us, starting now. But we need to work out what that means.
2. We commit ourselves spiritually, in an inclusive sense of the word, to a common rule: monthly worship (say), regular prayer, regular projects. And we see where that takes us. We draw other people in. We (progressively larger, more inclusive) seek out resources and share them; we test out ideas, rejecting many; we find some and develop others, and are not surprised to discover that other people are also attracted to a hopeful, dynamic and communal

expression of 'life in all its fullness' – as the climate changes, and as pressure on the environment increases.

3. We close the church as it is, and play a part in creating a new charitable association which incorporates Christian worship on a weekly basis (perhaps on Sunday mornings), but with a much more inclusive constitution, where becoming an associate does not entail Christian belief, but instead expresses commitment to building community across age groups, faith groups, ethnic groups, political groups. We draw people into this (people with the full range of needs and skills, like us) and put our energy and our efforts into making a vibrant, inclusive place; people commit to it as a place of community, not to church. Anyone who wants to worship is free to do so. Anyone who wants to pursue a progressive Christian theology is free to do so, and to offer the fruits of that to the community.

This is all a bit rough and ready, and only meant as a contribution to discussions. In the meantime, and on a continuing basis - Happy Easter!

*Andy Howes*

## **~ Creating a rock garden ~**

To create our rock garden we cleared a large site, and made sure there was plenty of rubble left as part of the landscaping, about 40 tons.





Areas of soil were left at the margins to support the trees around the edge of the gardens, and to provide for habitat diversity. The rubble areas were sown with a chalk adapted grass-clover mixture, where the clover will act as the nitrogen fixer for the ground, which is classified as nutrient poor.



Bare soil and areas where the rubble meets soil were sown with wild flower seed mixes, again varieties suitable for a calcareous habitats.





In addition to these wild flower mixes, other single species seeds were sown in clusters (poppies, campanula).

In early May, forsythia twigs will be used to create a peripheral wall of spring yellow towards the Wellington road-Wilbraham road corner.

The intermittent water feature has been removed, and drains renovated appropriately. I look forward to seeing what grows, and what wildlife we get as a result, hopefully more than just brambles, interesting though they are.

Our thanks to Tom Perks and his team at Vale Park Demolition for a very smooth process, and Rob Taylor at Byrom Clark Roberts for planning and co-ordinating, and our neighbours for their patience.



Thanks to the Junior Church team for sowing about 1.5 million seeds on Easter Day. Parables abound. Thanks too to invertebrate consultants Steve and Gwyn.

(As long as we don't get any bats....)

*David Garner*

## **~ A Letter from Indonesia ~**

**Dear Everyone at Union Chapel,**

Greetings from our hot hometown, sometimes it could be really hot, especially when it is about to rain. Other days, it could be raining the whole day that we don't want to go anywhere. We hope that all of you are enjoying the spring and the weather. Sometimes we miss the British weather when it is too hot over here.

Rudy, Aubrey and I are already settled after the last 2 months or so. It took a longer time than we anticipated. so glad that finally we are 100% settled. Rudy will start working next month after months of waiting in uncertainty. I will be back full time working next month too. Aubrey has found a school. He decided to register at a school managed by the university in which both Rudy and I are working. It was amazing how finally he came up with the decision. He has found some new friends at Sunday School, some of them could speak in English. The only thing that shocks Aubrey is the length of the service for the kids and the number of kids in his Sunday School class. There are around 30 kids, in his class/age! And they always have the proper service like the adults, so it is quite a change for him. They are going to have Easter celebration this coming Sunday. I guess Aubrey starts enjoying life here.

This morning, Aubrey was asking me if people at Union Chapel miss him. He sends his love to every one. He misses Quinn, Rory, Jess and Isobel, and his beloved teachers at Junior church, Alan, Lorna, and David. He said that he missed having the Junior church and all the activities. It might be because he has a totally different Junior Church now.

So sad to know that Linton House is flattened, but glad that finally there will be something done to Linton House after the long wait. so much memories when we lived there.

Glad to be able to keep in touch with all of you at Union chapel. We miss every one of you and we miss the church lunch too! especially Aubrey, he misses the soup.

Hope to hear from all of you. Following is our latest picture, it is difficult to get Aubrey smiles in pictures :



Love from us in Salatiga, Indonesia

**Kris, Rudy, and Aubrey**

## **~ Praying in the light of Brexit ~**

One of the great joys of nature is the cycles of the seasons. Things come and go and are always changing. A few years ago I started to try and notice the different sounds that birds made – it isn't just birdsong, but the songs of different birds. I'm still no good at it, but keep trying. Once you can identify (some) birds by ear as well as by sight you become much more aware of what is around, what is coming and what has left. Each spring I now count in the returning birds, as well as

emerging butterflies and moths and flowers and dragonflies – and other things I am only just learning to recognise.

April and May are particularly noteworthy for the returning migratory birds – Chiffchaffs, Sand Martins, Willow Warblers, Swallows, Whitethroat, Reed and Sedge Warblers have all been welcomed back so far.

This year spring has arrived with a prevailing xenophobic atmosphere generated by Brexit, rising racism, little England isolationism, persecution of asylum seekers and so on and so on. In this atmosphere it has felt particularly appropriate to welcome in these avian migrants, to celebrate our connectivity with the rest of the planet, to say yes to openness and no to exclusion. I find most traditional prayer unhelpful, but maybe this mindful appreciation and acknowledgement of our visitors is close to what it really is all about?

*Steve Roberts*

## **~ Snippets Of Hebrew: Deer and Oaks**

Hebrew sees things in concrete terms, and the vocabulary reflects their functional view of the world. This is in contrast to the Greek approach. Greek thought, describes objects in relation to their appearance. So Greeks would describe a pencil as about 6 inches long and red. Hebrew thought would describe it as a writing thing. This concrete view, leads to some interesting differences in translation.

A deer and an oak in Hebrew are the same word, pronounced something like AYIL. This is because the Hebrews with their functional concrete view see them as the same. The connection is a strong leader. An oak is a very strong tree amongst the trees of the forest. A stag is a very strong animal amongst the animals. Leaders are strong, otherwise no one would follow them.

In Ps 29:9 the KJV translates the word for leader as  
“The voice of the Lord makes the deer (AYIL) to calve”

The NIV renders it,

“The voice of the Lord twists the oaks (AYIL)”



The Hebrew mind would have understood this to mean  
“The voice of the Lord makes the strong leaders (AYIL) turn”

Why God would want to twist oaks is a mystery. But he might use his power to influence men. Stripping the forests bare, could mean removing people from power. Remember Daniel, who said God rules in the kingdoms of men and gives them to whoever he chooses. But one could interpret that from the metaphor of stripping certain trees bare. But the ancient Hebrews would understand that. This was their book, written in their mother tongue. But how should we translate it?

2 Kings 24:15 translates the word AYIL correctly, as the mighty of the land, or the strong leaders.

And he (Nebuchadnezzar) carried away (king) Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty (Hebrew word is AYIL and means mighty, or oaks, or rams, or dear or pillars) of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Of course context helps, but the king of Babylon would be unlikely to carry away the oaks and the deer along with all the other categories of people mentioned in the chapter in 2 Kings.

It seems the king of Babylon had his eye on the elite, and the national treasures (verse 13!) because he emptied the temple of all its treasure. No surprise there.

A final example of the concrete, is that Hebrew describes anger as one's nose. When angry, one breathes heavily through the nose, and the nostrils flare out. Psalm 103 v 8 reads in Hebrew God is slow to nose. But there is no point in translating this literally, because it was not the intention of the author. So in our bibles it is God is slow to anger. So virtually everything that might be thought of as abstract in Hebrew is expressed as a concrete expression. This might lead to some interesting possibilities for interpretation!

*Geoff Walker*

## **~ News of the Family ~**

We are very sad to report that the oldest member of our church, **Connie West**, died on Good Friday. Connie moved to North Wales some seven years ago because of illness and to be near her daughter.

We send Lindsay, David, Andrew and the rest of Connie's family our sympathy and hold them very much in our mind at this time.

Connie's funeral will take place on Tuesday 30th April at 11.45am at Colwyn Bay Crematorium.



A full appreciation of Connie's time at Union Chapel will be published in the next issue of Christward

**Michael Welford** is in Wythenshawe Hospital and has been very ill but is making a slow recovery. Visitors would be appreciated but please liaise with Enid before going.

It was good to see **Colin Marchbank-Smith** at the Maundy Thursday service. Colin is still in significant pain and is seeing his consultant again on the 7th May

We said goodbye to **Revd Jane Henderson** who has been our interim Minister for a few years. Jane has been instrumental in getting us to think about our future and also in facilitating the talks with MSV. We are grateful to her for all the hard work which she has put in on our behalf and wish her well for the future.

**Helen Robinson** who has addressed and stamped the envelopes for the magazines which are sent out to people who no longer live in Manchester has decided to take a well earned rest. Although Helen has not been able to be actively involved at Union Chapel her interest in the people and work of the church has been steadfast.

## **~ Church Meeting held at Union Chapel on Sunday 14th April 2019 ~**

### **Present**

Gwyn Heritage Roberts, Steve Roberts, Beryl Dykes, Gwen Mattock, Jonathan Roberts, Margaret Redhouse, Margaret Garner, Margaret Edmonds, Ted Land, Geoff Walker, Carole Walker, Andy Howes, Leonie Earnshaw, David Garner, Alan Redhouse

### **Apologies**

Enid Welford, Michael Welford, Brenda Marston, Lorna Richardson, Rose Bell, Carmen Bowman, Colin Marchbank-Smith.

**Minutes of the previous Church Meeting** were approved without amendment.

**AOB:** None, but that we should at the next meeting discuss Jane's resignation.

### **1 Baptist Pension Scheme (BPS)**

David G explained that the pension scheme is in deficit, and that where we cease to contribute actively to the scheme, we become liable for our share in that deficit. This happens when we have no minister for over three years. However, we can choose to pay our share now, whether or not we call another minister in that time.

We currently pay a sum per month towards paying off our share of the deficit. If we paid off our share of the deficit now, then we would not have to pay the monthly sum. There would also be administration fees



to pay. If the pension issue were resolved in this way, by being paid off, then conversion to a CIO would be more straightforward. It was proposed (DG) and seconded (Gwyn HR) and approved unanimously that:

We would make enquiries with a view to paying off our part of the deficit of the BPS. A final decision would be made at the next church meeting when appropriate information had been evaluated.

## **2 Steering Group Update**

Gwyn HR recapped the history of our involvement with our surveyor Stephen Welch and the housing association Moss Care St Vincent's (MSV).

Stephen Welch (SW) had assisted us in the hand-over and financial negotiations with the University of Manchester over Linton House (recently demolished). He has recently been talking to MSV on our behalf to ascertain:

- i** Do we have a good deal with them financially for the whole site proposal?
- ii** Is the deal (land for leased accommodation) acceptable under charity law?

Our three concerns with the development have been:

- a** Will there be a capital sum left over when the cost of the new accommodation has been deducted from the land value?"
- b** It was a condition of going forward with the whole site redevelopment that phasing (accommodation for the church on the current site during the build) would happen.
- c** The housing would largely be affordable to rent.

**Item c** has changed from affordable to rent to shared ownership, presumably largely due to changes in the amount of grants available. MSV asked at the January meeting with us if this was a deal breaker for us. SW suggested that the decision to go ahead or not was up to us

as a church. He points out that we would get more financial value for the LH site on the open market.

Leonie clarified that shared ownership meant that occupiers could buy the part of the flat they did not own, and that they could then sell it on the open market. The scheme would be compliant with charity law.

***Comments on a b c above:***

**b** The resolution at the September church meeting allowed continuing working with MSV on the whole site development on the basis that phased development were to take place. Although Portakabin based accommodation is theoretically possible on site for the church, the risks to the health and safety to anyone using the building from an active building site next door would probably prevent their use. Therefore we would almost certainly have to move off site during the 18 months of build. This would include the users.

Therefore we have no current resolution to continue discussions with MSV.

**a** SW said that the price paid by MSV for the land would mean that the church would not be expected to pay anything for the accommodation provided for us. MSV said in early documents that the land value would be same as the accommodation provided, implying no capital receipt from the outset. SW says that he has not enough information about the land value MSV put on the site nor for the cost of providing rooms to us.

SW points out that a commercial valuer would look at a range of options for us, such as whole site, Linton House only, Linton House and Large Hall etc..

So overall we cannot proceed with MSV on the basis of the September resolution because:

there is no church meeting resolution to do so (phasing unlikely)

of our continuing misgivings about the financial structure of the deal (i.e. There is no specific site value given; it is just notionally the cost of our rooms and the cost of Portacabins and also the proposed church accommodation looks very expensive for what it is.)

MG commented that the market would be quite different after Brexit was resolved.

GM suggested that we carry on as we are and wait until the market improved.

GW asked about grants; MG and GHR said grants had dropped so MSV had to go with more shared ownership.

JR asked for charity law clarification; we have no option but to demonstrate compliance with our charitable aims.

LE asked about cost of valuation for land option; GHR estimated £2 500 for an initial costing.

SR commented that although the current scheme with MSV was not viable or what we needed, we should keep the door open with them.

GHR commented that MSV had recently merged and still settling down, which would explain the disorder we experienced with them, and they may have settled down in 12 months.

DG asked if we had finished considering whole site development with all its implications; some strong supporters of whole site development were not at the meeting.

ADR said we needed to pause in our proceedings, and have a rest from the issue. It had dominated church life to the detriment of what we should be doing as a church. We do not have a clear future for ourselves yet; we had handed this over to MSV.

We needed to decide exactly what to say to MSV. ADR suggested holding off further discussion till after Christmas.

CW wanted clarification on what would happen to the site; DG said we would seed with wild flower seeds (adding topsoil would reduce value of site, as would have to be removed again).

Mgt E said that other Housing associations had done this kind of development if MSV were unable to give us what we wanted.



GHR said that other developers such as Great Places said they would develop the site commercially and use the profit to provide cash to invest elsewhere in affordable housing in Manchester. Only MSV said they would build affordable to rent housing on the Linton House site. However other developers would give us new options, and others rather than MSV could develop the site.

The meeting agreed that we should tell MSV our intentions, and a draft letter (AH and GHR) with the following points:

- A** No phasing so no resolution to proceed
- B** Church will review situation after Brexit deadline in October 2019, putting things on hold for six months.
- C** Remove the commitment to exclusive dealing with MSV.

The Church agreed to such a letter being sent (Mgt G proposed, Gwen seconded, carried unanimously).

There was a vote of thanks to DG for his part in the work on the demolition of Linton House.

### **3 Date of next AGM was agreed to be 30<sup>th</sup> June**

Meeting closed with singing at 12.10.

## **~ Events ~**

### **David Goodbourn Annual Lecture 'Sweet Charity'**

**Tuesday 30th April, 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm at Luther King House**

**Lecturer:** Michael H Taylor; Emeritus Professor of Social Theology at the University of Birmingham, former Director of Christian Aid and past Principal of Northern Baptist College.

Refreshments from 7pm, followed by the lecture at 7.30pm

There is no charge for this event, but it would be helpful to have some idea of numbers, so please let us know if you hope to attend.

For further details, and to register your interest in attending, please contact Luther King House by e-mail or by telephone on 0161 249 2504.

**Christian Aid Week 2019: 12th to 18th May**

**Stop worrying and Enjoy your Life**

**Church Weekend June 21st to 23rd 2019**

**at Beechwood Court, Mountain Road, LL32 8PY Conway**

For one weekend let's celebrate the good things of this life. Let's seek out resources in our faith which affirm the goodness of creation, of human creativity, of human relationships. Let's share what brings us pleasure. Let's enjoy hearing, seeing, participating in what we enjoy. Let's share together the best that this world has to offer.

If you come across anything you think might be relevant and useful please do forward to Steve. [SteveRoberts@live.co.uk](mailto:SteveRoberts@live.co.uk)

For further information about the Weekend e.g accommodation, cost... contact David Garner on 0161 434 4984 or [david.garner@me.com](mailto:david.garner@me.com)

## **Talking to Each Other ~**

*If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome.*

*Please send them by email to [alan.redhouse@virgin.net](mailto:alan.redhouse@virgin.net) or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.*

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